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Bulgaria Says Defector Was Only a Mechanic

ROME, March 23 (Reuters) — The Bulgarian Embassy in Rome said today that a Bulgarian defector, reported to have said his country was behind a plot to kill Pope John Paul II in 1981, was neither a diplomat nor a secret agent. It added that the defector's allegations about Bulgarian involvement in any such plot should be reconsidered in this light.

An embassy spokesman, Vassili Dimitrov, commenting on a report today in The New York Times, said the defector, Iordan Mantarov, was in France "as a maintenance mechanic of the Bulgarian firm Agro-Mascina-Impex" before he defected in 1981. "Hence he was neither a diplomat nor a secret agent," the spokesman said.

The report in The Times said Mr. Mantarov was deputy commercial attaché at the Bulgarian Embassy in Paris before his defection and had told the French internal counterespionage service about the purported Bulgarian link. The spokesman said Mr. Mantarov had "probably decided to use for his own purposes" the Italian judicial inquiry into purported Bulgarian contacts with Mehmet Ali Agca, the Turk convicted of shooting the Pope.